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## Heroin And The War

Some inquisitive voters may have wondered why President Nixon, after long silence concerning the havoc wrought by heroin among the troops in Indochina, took occasion during his political foray into Texas to visit an anti-narcotics checkpoint on the Mexican border. There he proclaimed his firm determination to crush the heroin trade in the United States.

What inspired Mr. Nixon to depart from his announced intention to do no early personal campaigning? Why did war against heroin become, at the moment, his outstanding posture before the public?

Perhaps the answer lies in certain developments in the world of books. On Aug. 17 Harper & Row published "The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia," by Alfred W. McCoy. Based on a year and a half of incessant probing in that part of the world, it included more than 250 interviews with persons familiar with the drug traffic there. His conclusions, documented in stupendous detail, are summed up in a letter to his publisher:

"As you well know, the book implicates the CIA in the narcotics traffic which is rampant in Southeast Asia. Thousands of American GIs fighting in Vietnam have become heroin addicts and Southeast Asia is fast becoming the major source of heroin entering the U.S. The CIA, the State Department, and the whole U.S. apparatus in Indochina is aiding and abetting this narcotics traffic" and "by putting top priority on U.S. military and political gains in Indochina, to the detriment of anti-narcotics work."

McCoy's book has not proved to be a bombshell. Governmentally, it was pretty well taken care of by official silence aided by the prevailing moral torpor. The big bomb was dropped four or five days before President Nixon set off for Texas, when The New York Review of Books published nine pages of correspondence between the CIA and Harper & Row, covering a two months' attempt by the CIA to induce the publisher to drop the book or tone down its contents.

The page proofs asked for by the CIA were delivered and letter after letter was written and answered. I have not read the book, but I have read the CIA defense. If ever a public body destroyed itself, the CIA achieved that by a combination of evasion, obvious coercion of helpless witnesses, and unconvincing denials.

On the heels of this devastating publication, President Nixon went to the Mexican border and launched his crusade against the heroin traffic.

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